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## MAINE VOICES

# BIW not getting administration support it needs

A federal budget that cuts shipbuilding is not a budget that helps Maine shipbuilders.

Bath Iron Works and its 6,000 workers are facing a double-barreled assault.

The Navy is both cutting the number of ships BIW had planned to build and threatening to close one of the two shipyards that build surface warships. I work hard every day to preserve jobs at BIW.

The budget resolution passed by Congress last week makes matters worse for the shipyard and its workers. It failed to restore even one dollar of the billions President Bush slashed from the shipbuilding budget.

Instead, the budget resolution ratifies his proposal to build just four new ships in Fiscal Year '06, none at BIW. Moreover, it increases federal budget deficits that lead to spending cuts for shipbuilding.

For these reasons, I voted against the majority's budget resolution on April 29. A budget that cuts shipbuilding is not a budget that helps BIW.

Current Navy budgets are insufficient to fund the fleet the Navy says it needs. Recently, the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office reported that the Navy must spend \$14 billion to \$17 billion a year on new ship construction to maintain its targeted fleet size.

The president's budget

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Rep. Tom Allen**, a Democrat, represents Maine's 1st District in the U.S. Congress.

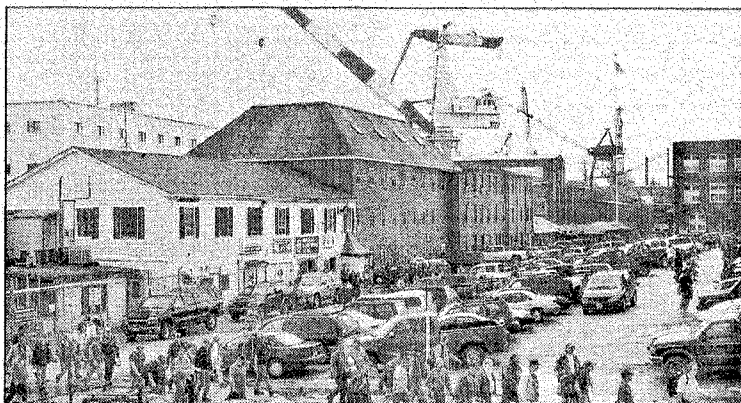
provides less than half that amount. It proposes only \$6.7 billion in FY '06 to build just four ships. It allocates no ships for BIW in either FY '06 or FY '07. The budget resolution matched the president's overall defense number, giving congressional approval to his totally inadequate shipbuilding budget.

I have consistently criticized the insufficient shipbuilding budgets submitted by both Presidents Clinton and Bush. These low starting points frustrate our efforts in Congress to add ships.

Congress' first opportunity to fix the shipbuilding shortfall was in the budget resolution. If we can't provide more money in the budget, the Appropriations Committee's ability to fund additional ships is very limited.

As a member of the House Budget Committee, I offered an amendment to add \$2 billion for shipbuilding in FY '06. This was new money, so new ship funds would not compete with other defense priorities.

These funds could buy an additional DDG-51 destroyer or accelerate funding for the DD-X, the next generation of surface combatants. My amendment was supported by all Democrats on the Committee, but was defeated by the Republican majority in



Staff photo by John Patriquin

**BIW workers go home** at the 3:30 p.m. shift change in this April 20 file photo.

order to protect the president's budget.

On May 5, the House approved a provision to block the Navy from ending the two-shipyard construction approach for the DD-X, as part of the supplemental appropriations bill. I worked hard to ensure this provision becomes law. This is meaningful and welcome news for BIW.

By contrast, the budget resolution had only a nonbinding expression of support for two shipyards, which does not have the force of law.

The resolution had another nonbinding provision calling for alternative ways to fund shipbuilding that could provide some stability to shipbuilders. However, the nonpartisan Congressional Research Service concluded that without increasing ship purchases, "it would simply trade an inability to afford

something now for an inability to afford something later."

The budget resolution also hurts BIW in the long term. It perpetuates huge federal deficits that the administration uses to justify shipbuilding cuts. We can't find money for the ships our nation's defense demands if we vote for budgets that drive the nation deeper into debt.

Real security for BIW requires dramatically new priorities in the defense and federal budgets. Navy destroyers cost billions of dollars. For BIW and national defense, we must do much more than tinker with language that lacks the force of law.

Let's not pretend that such language offers BIW and its workers a meaningful solution to the Pentagon's annual neglect of shipbuilding. We must do better.

— Special to the Press Herald